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ABSTRACT

Communication between students and teachers is crucial at all educational levels and is particularly important in adult learning situations. Good feedback should be descriptive, specific, and constructive. Constructive feedback requires an atmosphere of trust and, above all, should not violate the personal integrity of either the sender or the receiver. When providing feedback, the speaker must assume ownership of the feelings that are being expressed. Therefore, the word "I" should be the subject of the feedback sentence. The predicate of the feedback sentence should contain a verb that conveys the speaker's feelings and should also describe the behaviors related to the feeling. (MN)

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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Introduction

Communication is crucial to education because it is the process by which information is exchanged between teachers and students. The classical communications model views communication as the process by which one person encodes a message and conveys it to another person. That person then decodes it. Both of these stages involve interpretation. Therefore, the accuracy of the communication process depends upon how well the sender and the receiver perceive the intentions of the other.

Because of the possibilities of misinterpretation in the communication process, giving and receiving feedback is necessary. Giving feedback is either the verbal or nonverbal process through which an individual lets others know his/her perceptions and feelings about their behavior. Receiving feedback is a similar process; however, here the person is asking others to provide their perceptions and feelings about that individual's behavior.

Good Feedback

Good feedback which is helpful to the receiver has several characteristics. It should be descriptive. Descriptive feedback describes one's reaction to another's behavior, and it allows those receiving the information to deal with it in their own manner. Motives are not ascribed to the behavior, and judgements are not make. Instead of putting others on the defensive

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DESCRIPTIVE WORDS FOR EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Directions: Providing helpful feedback requires that (a) ownership of the action be claimed by the speaker, (b) that meaningful words be used to express the speaker's feelings, and (c) that the specific behaviors of the listener be described by the speaker. The following formula can be used to take ownership of feedback:

I + Feeling Verb + Descriptive Behavior

Thus, instead of saying "The correct answer for the math problem is not given," one would say, "I am frustrated because I cannot yet correctly multiply fractions." The following is a list of descriptive words that can be useful in giving feedback.

1. accepted
2. angry
3. annoyed
4. anxious
5. apprehensive
6. at ease
7. bad
8. better
9. blocked
10. calm
11. comfortable
12. confused
13. delighted
14. depressed
15. discouraged
16. distressed
17. doubtful
18. down
19. elated
20. embarrassed
21. encouraged
22. excited
23. frustrated
24. furious
25. good
26. great
27. growing
28. happy
29. hopeful
30. humiliated
31. joyous
32. justified
33. lost
34. looking forward to
35. mad
36. motivated
37. nervous
38. open
39. optimistic
40. pleased

41. proud
42. relaxed
43. resentful
44. sad
45. scared
46. shook up
47. secure
48. sure
49. uptight
50. worried

Exercises

1. Divide into groups of two. Each person should have a copy of the list of Descriptive Words for Expressing Feelings. Practice giving and receiving feedback on topics related to your learning and going to school. Be sure to take ownership for the feedback that you give to your partner and to use as many feeling words as possible. After 5 minutes, select a new partner.

2. Divide into groups of three. Two people will do the same activities as described in Exercise 1. The third person will observe the conversation between the other two. After 5 minutes, the observer will provide feedback to the others on how well they took ownership of their feelings and used the descriptive words. Remember that the observers should also be taking ownership for their feelings during this feedback. Change roles so that each person in the group has a chance to be the observer.

3. Construct your own list of descriptive words which express feelings. Your list should contain both words you use everyday and words that you wish to add to your regular speaking vocabulary.

4. While watching television talk shows or while interacting with your family and friends, listen to the feedback that is given and requested. How often do the speakers practice the characteristics of good feedback? How often do they take ownership for their feelings? As you listen, think of ways that the comments of these speakers could be changed to provide more constructive feedback.

5. Consciously practice giving constructive feedback to your teacher and classmates.

and in the position of being judged, feedback which is descriptive and nonevaluative allows listeners to interpret their own behaviors.

Helpful feedback is also specific. It addresses the exact behavior to which one is reacting. These specific comments should focus on behaviors which can be modified. While feedback about long existing traits may inhibit communication, information about alterable characteristics can increase a person's knowledge of their blind spots.

Constructive feedback requires an atmosphere of trust. As in any adult learning situation, this climate conveys a human concern for the other person as an individual. Such a feeling respects the rights of others to use the feedback as they believe that it is appropriate. More importantly, it does not violate the personal integrity of either the sender or the receiver.

A Feedback Model

When providing feedback, the speaker must assume ownership of the feelings that are being expressed. This requires the use of the word *I* as the subject of the feedback sentence. The predicate of the sentence should contain a verb which conveys the speaker's feelings. It should also describe the behaviors related to the feeling. For example, I am delighted that you have read this material; further, I am hopeful they you will use it to provide better feedback to students and to teach students to give more constructive feedback. Such sentences can provide excellent feedback by expressing both the feelings and content of the message.

Notes

1. Ideas and exercises related to feedback are more fully developed in J. E. Jones and J. W. Pfeiffer's *The 1975 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators* which is published by University Associates in La Jolla, California. The handbook served as a reference for this article.
2. The "Descriptive Words for Expressing Feelings" list is from *Learning Modules for Adult Educators: Active Listening* which was produced at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

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